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SUBJECT: COALITION DISPUTE CUTS SHORT NEW PARLIAMENT'S OPENING  
SESSION

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The first session of Montenegro's new Parliament April 23 was quickly adjourned because the ruling coalition failed to agree on the Parliament's Deputy Speakers. Adding to the drama, the two largest opposition parties boycotted the playing of the national anthem which marked the opening of the session. We expect the coalition partners will resolve the Deputy Speaker impasse soon, but the initial squabbling over electoral spoils does not bode well for coalition cohesion. END SUMMARY.

New Parliament Opens, Quickly Closes

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¶2. (U) Montenegro's new Parliament, elected on March 29, convened for the first time on April 23. The oldest and youngest MPs ceremonially co-chaired. After the playing of the national anthem and a vote to set the agenda, the State Election Commission chair confirmed the results of the parliamentary election. At this point, MPs were supposed to move on to the second agenda item - the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speakers - but the co-chairs called a ten-minute break. As MPs milled about in the hallway, word circulated that the session had adjourned, with no information when it would resume.

Coalition Squabbling To Blame

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¶3. (SBU) According to both the press and our contacts, at issue is a dispute within the ruling coalition over the Deputy Speaker positions. (Note: The coalition consists of the leading Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS; which has 35 of the coalition's 48 MPs), long-time junior partner the Social Democratic Party (SDP; nine MPs), and the Bosniak Party (BS; three MPs) and Croat Civic Initiative (HGI; one MP).

¶4. (SBU) While SDP leader Ranko Krivokapic is supposed to retain his Speaker position as part of the initial coalition agreement, his (currently two) deputies are up for grabs (and the DPS refused to vote for Krivokapic until the issue was settled). In the last Parliament, the DPS and SDP each had one Deputy Speaker, but the coalition has expanded, and one Deputy slot should go to an opposition party (likely the Socialist People's

Party (SNP)). (Note: The OSCE and EC recommended in 2006 that the opposition receive one Deputy Speaker, but the coalition refused to confirm a candidate from the Serbian List (SL) in the previous Parliament because of the SL's refusal to accept Montenegrin state symbols.)

15. (SBU) Currently, the coalition's three main parties all insist on a Deputy Speaker (and the Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA), a pro-GoM party, also has argued that one slot should go to an Albanian):

--SDP: Krivokapic told the press on April 24 that the Deputy position was a matter of principle for his party. "We are not asking for anything more than what we had," he said. Asked about reports that the DPS was pressing the SDP to cede its slot to the Bosniak Party, SDP Deputy Head Ivan Brajovic told us April 22 that, since the DPS invited the Bosniaks into the coalition, "any concessions need to come from the DPS."

--Krivokapic told the Ambassador on April 24 that the DPS move (to hold up his candidacy until the Deputy Speaker issue was worked out) had come as a last-minute surprise. He added that there were no limits to the number of Deputy Speaker positions allowed, and he had no objection to increasing the number. He said he would wait ten days or so before re-submitting his candidacy.

--DPS: DPS Political Director Predrag Sekulic told us April 23 that the DPS, as the strongest party in Montenegro, should

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retain the Deputy Speaker. (Note: There is strong sentiment within the DPS that the SDP, which will receive 20 percent of all government positions despite low polling numbers, is getting far more than it deserves in both Parliament and Government.) Sekulic also told us the DPS felt no obligation to give its Deputy slot to the Bosniaks. The DPS-BS agreement promised the latter three MPs in Parliament and a Minister or two Deputy Ministers in the GoM. "If they want the Deputy Speaker," he told us, "they will need to give up their Minister."

--Bosniak Party: BS leader Rafet Husovic confirmed to us on April 22 the terms of the DPS-BS agreement, and noted that his party also would get five percent of all GoM positions. However, he said, it was important that one Deputy Speaker position went to a minority party, and as the largest minority grouping, his party was the logical recipient. "In fact," he told us, "we will insist on it." (He added that the DPS and SDP needed to remember that many Bosniaks were against the party joining the coalition in the first place.)

16. (SBU) Several interlocutors mentioned (as Krivokapic had to the Ambassador) that one way out of the impasse was to expand the number of Deputy Speakers from two to three or even more. However, sentiment within the DPS is still running against giving anything to the SDP. As DPS parliamentary whip Miodrag Vukovic told us April 23, "there should be three positions - for DPS, a minority party (either BS or the HGI), and the opposition - and no more."

Opposition Boycotts Anthem

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¶17. (SBU) Adding to the circus-like atmosphere surrounding the Parliament's opening, the two largest opposition parties - the SNP and the New Serbian Democracy (NOVA) - boycotted the national anthem. NOVA's move was not a surprise. NOVA is the successor of the Serbian List, and while the new party has grudgingly accepted Montenegrin statehood, its Serb nationalist base continues to object to the country's symbols. However, the SNP boycott was unexpected, and indicates that the civic party is still hobbled by Serbs who still comprise the majority of the party's supporters. (Comment: Pro-Serb parties are particularly neuralgic about the national anthem, which contains elements supposedly drafted by a WWII-era fascist collaborator. End Comment.)

¶18. (SBU) Krivokapic told the press after the session that the boycott made the coalition's job of choosing an opposition party to receive the Deputy position easier. "Only those parties who respect the Constitution should hold the position," he said, noting the SDP now would support a candidate from the Movement for Change (PzP) or one of the opposition Albanian parties.

Comment

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¶19. (SBU) We expect the dispute over the Deputy Speaker slots will be resolved soon (the press reported April 27 that the DPS and SDP would begin formal talks this week), and that Parliament could resume on May 5, after the May Day holiday. However, it is not a good sign that the coalition - which campaigned on the promise of stability and an energetic response to the economic crisis - is off to such a disorganized and acrimonious start. It also indicates that this new iteration of the DPS-SDP coalition will not be immune to the squabbling that characterized the previous Parliament.

¶10. (SBU) The DPS-SDP talks, which presumably will be paralleled by DPS-BS meetings, also will discuss the composition of the new GoM, whose head (per the Constitution) must be named within 30 days of the new Parliament's first session. At this point, there have not been reports of significant disagreements over which party is getting which ministry. DPS interlocutors tell

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us that although names of ministers have not been decided (and some changes are inevitable), they expect Djukanovic to return as PM.  
MOORE